



An Innovative Approach to Reducing Smoking on College Campuses

Public Health Problem

Tobacco use is a significant problem on college campuses and consequently impacts young adult initiation and use. College is a time in a young person's life that is crucial to whether or not tobacco use becomes an established behavior or is abandoned. College campuses provide an opportune setting for interventions that help young adults make healthful decisions about tobacco use. Among college-age students surveyed at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIU-C), an estimated 35.6 percent of males and 35.3 percent of females were current cigarette smokers.

Taking Action

Over the past few years, the Illinois Department of Public Health has used CDC and state Master Settlement Agreement funding to fund the Live Free! Tobacco Free college campus project developed at SIU-C. The Live Free! project involves engaging college students in comprehensive initiatives to establish smoke-free campuses and to develop and implement tobacco prevention and education strategies. The campus-wide collaboration at SIU-C to develop a comprehensive strategy for combating tobacco use in higher education began in spring 2001. CDC worked closely with the program to ensure that it incorporated a comprehensive approach in the intervention. CDC provided statewide training on the Guide to Community Preventive Services recommendations, and also included a review of the Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction. These documents will serve as resources to guide their multi-component initiative. The project was developed as a model that may be adopted by other universities in the state of Illinois and beyond. A full media campaign was initiated in 2002, including print, radio, and Web components. In spring 2003, an advocacy campaign was added to capitalize on the student support of campus policies that support a healthy environment in which students learn and live. A Web site was created to encourage advocacy, provide information, and link the university community to available cessation options.

Implications and Impact

Beginning with the 2004 fall semester, smoking is not permitted within 25 feet of entrances to all university buildings and is not allowed in any of the residence halls at SIU-C. Simultaneously, the student center stopped selling tobacco products. Cessation services are now offered to students through SIU-C student health programs and dental care providers and through the community. To date, seven state universities have expressed interest in Live Free! training, and project staff are collaborating with the Illinois Lung Association of Metropolitan Chicago as well as the Cook County Health Department to offer the training to suburban Chicago junior colleges. Live Free! project staff completed development of a tobacco prevention and control curriculum for university-level health education classes.

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